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# GRAY'S ELEGY,

— WITH —

Literary and Grammatical Explanations  
and Comments,

— AND —

SUGGESTIONS AS TO HOW IT SHOULD BE TAUGHT.



BY R. HEBER HOLBROOK,  
VICE-PRESIDENT NATIONAL NORMAL UNIVERSITY,  
LEBANON, OHIO.

Author of "Outlines of U. S. History," "The New Method, or School Expositions,"  
"Drill Lists in U. S. History," &c.



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LEBANON, OHIO:  
C. K. HAMILTON & CO., UNIVERSITY PUBLISHERS,  
1886.

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## → P R E F A C E . ←

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IN the preparation of this work, the writer has made no effort at literary flourish. He is exceedingly anxious not to appear as one attempting to paint the lily or adorn the rose, or as Lowell puts it—

“ Plastering our swallow-nests on the awful Past,  
And twittering around the work of larger men  
As we had builded, what we but deface.”

On the other hand, he would be simply a plain, humble, yet reverent guide for plain, humble and reverent strangers to the beauties of this matchless poem, even as the sexton of a beautiful cathedral directs the steps of the respectful visitor through the sounding arch ways of his loved minster.

If the comments and explanations seem excessively elementary,—even puerile,—to certain readers, they must remember that they are intended for very beginners in literature, such as are found in an ordinary sixth reader class in a country school. Yet, teachers will see at once that these pages are intended for the teacher rather than for the pupils, to whom it will remain only a reference book, if it fall into their hands at all.

This little volume is the result of practical class management, and is sent forth to help forward the “Expressive” phase\* of school work to which the writer has especially dedicated his efforts.

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\* See “New Methods,” p. 118. C. K. Hamilton & Co.



# GRAY'S "ELEGY."

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## A VISIT TO STOKE POGIS,

*The Scene of the Elegy.\**

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It is a cool afternoon in July, and the shadows are falling eastward on fields of waving grain and lawns of emerald velvet. Overhead a few tight clouds are drifting, and the green boughs of the great elms are gently stirred by a breeze from the west. Across one of the more distant fields a flock of sable rooks,—some of them fluttering and cawing,—wings its slow and melancholy flight. There is the sound of the whetting of a scythe, and, near by, the twittering of many birds upon a cottage roof. On either side of the country road, which runs like a white rivulet through banks of green, the hawthorn hedges are shining, and the bright sod is spangled with all the will flowers of an English summer. An odor of lime trees and of new-mown hay sweetens the air for miles and miles around. Far off in the horizon's verge, just glimmering through the haze, rises the imperial citadel of Windsor, and close at hand a little child points to a gray spire peering out of a nest of ivy, and tells me this is Stoke Pogis Church.

If peace dwells anywhere upon this earth, its dwelling-place is here. You come into this little churchyard by a pathway across the park, and through a wooden turn-stile; and in one moment the whole world is left behind and forgotten. Here are the nodding elms; here is the yew tree's shade; here "heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap." All these graves seem very old. The long grass waves over them, and some of the low stones that mark them are entirely shrouded with ivy. Many of the "frail memorials" are made of wood. None of them is neglected or forlorn, but all of them seem to have been scattered here in that sweet disorder which is the perfection of rural loveliness. There never, of course, could have been any thought of creating this effect; yet it remains, to win your heart forever. And here, amid this mournful beauty, the little church itself nestles close to the ground, while every tree that waves its branches

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\*This beautiful sketch is taken from the scrap book of a friend. It originally appeared in the *N. Y. Tribune*. I am unable to discover the author, who will forgive me for thus helping to make his (or her) unknown name blessed among all the teachers and pupils who read this elegant product of genius.

around it, and every vine that climbers on its surface, seems to clasp it in the arms of love. Nothing breaks the silence but the sighing of the wind in the great yew tree, at the church door, beneath which was the poet's favorite seat, and where the brown needles, falling through many an autumn, have made a dense carpet on the turf. Now and then there is a faint rustle in the ivy; a fitful bird-note serves but to deepen the stillness; and from a rose tree near at hand a few leaves flutter down in soundless benediction on the dust beneath.

Gray was laid in the same grave with his mother, "the careful, tender mother of many children, one alone of whom," as he wrote upon her gravestone, "had the misfortune to survive her." Their tomb—a low, oblong, brick structure, covered with a large slab—stands a few feet away from the church wall, upon which is a small tablet to denote its place. The poet's name has not been inscribed above him. There was not need here of "storied urn or animated bust." The whole place is his monument, and the majestic ELEGY—giving to the soul of the place a form of seraphic beauty and a voice of celestial music—is his immortal epitaph.

"There scatter'd oft, the earliest of the year,  
By hands un-seen, are showers of violets found;  
The redbreast loves to build and warble there,  
And little footsteps lightly print the ground."

This stanza, originally a part of the ELEGY, was finally rejected by Gray.

There is a monument of Gray in Stoke Park, about three hundred yards from the church; but it seems commemorative of the builder rather than the poet. They intend to set a memorial window in the church, to honor him, and the visitor finds there a money-box for the reception of contributions in aid of this pious design. Nothing will be done amiss that serves to direct closer and closer attention to his life. It was one of the best lives ever recorded in the history of literature. It was a life singularly pure, noble and beautiful. In two qualities, sincerity and reticence, it was exemplary almost beyond a parallel; and those are qualities which literary character in the present day has great need to acquire. Gray was averse to publicity. He did not sway by the censure of other men; neither did he need their admiration as his breath of life. Poetry, to him, was a great art; and he added nothing to literature until he had first made it as nearly perfect as it could be made by the thoughtful, laborious exertion of his best powers, superadded to the spontaneous impulse and flow of his genius. More voluminous writers, Charles Dickens among the rest, have sneered at him because he wrote so little. The most colossal form of human conceit, probably, is that of the individual who thinks all other creatures inferior who happen to be unlike himself. This reticence on the part of Gray was, in fact, the grand emblem of his sincerity and the corner-stone of his imperishable renown. There is a better thing than the great man who is always speaking; and that is the great man who only speaks when he has a great word to say. Gray has left only a few poems; but, of his principal works, each is perfect in its kind, supreme and unapproachable. He did not test merit by reference to ill-

informed and capricious public opinion, but wrought according to the highest standards of art which learning and taste could furnish. His letters form an English Classic. There is no better prose in existence; there is very little extant that is so good. But the crowning glory of Gray's nature, the element that makes it so impressive, the charm that brings the pilgrim to Stoke Pogis Church to muse upon it, was the self-poised, sincere and lovely exaltation of its contemplative spirit. He was a man whose conduct of life would, first of all, purify, extend and adorn the temple of his own soul, out of which should afterwards flow, in their own free way, those choral harmonies that soothe, guide and exalt the human race. He lived before he wrote. The soul of the ELEGY is the soul of the man. It was his thought—which he has somewhere expressed in better words than these—that human beings are only worthy while those feelings endure which are engendered when death has just taken from us the objects of our love. That was the point of view from which he habitually looked upon the world; and no man who has learned the lessons of experience can doubt that he was right.

Gray was twenty-six years old when he wrote the first draft of the ELEGY. He began this poem in 1742, at Stoke Pogis, and he finished and published it in 1750. No visitor to this churchyard can miss either its inspiration or its imagery. The poet has been dead more than a hundred years, but the scene of his rambles and reveries has suffered no material change. One of his yew trees, indeed, much weakened with age, was some time since blown down in a storm, and its fragments have been carried away. A picturesque house, contiguous to the churchyard, which, in Queen Elizabeth's time, was a palace, and was visited by that sovereign, and which Gray knew as a manor, has now become a dairy. All the trees of the region have, of course, waxed and expanded—not forgetting the neighboring beeches of Birnam, among which he loved to wander, and where he might often have been found, sitting with his book, at some knarled wreath of “old fantastic roots.” But, in all its general characteristics, its rustic homeliness and peaceful beauty, this “glimmering landscape,” immortalized in his verse, is the same on which his living eyes have looked. There was no need to seek for him in any special spot. The cottage in which he once lived might, no doubt, be discovered; but every nook and vista, every green lane and upland lawn and ivy-mantled tower of this delicious solitude is haunted with his presence.

The night is coming on and the picture will soon be dark; but never, while memory lasts, can it fade out of the heart. What a blessing would be ours, if only we could hold forever that exaltation of the spirit, that sweet, resigned serenity, that pure freedom from all the passions of nature and all the cares of life, which comes upon us in such a place as this! Alas, and again, Alas! Even with the thought this golden mood begins to melt away; even with the thought comes our dismissal from its influence. Nor will it avail us anything now to linger at the shrine. Fortunate is he, though in bereavement and regret, who parts from beauty while yet her kiss is warm upon his lips,—waiting not for the last farewell word, hearing not the last notes of the music, seeing not the last gleams of sun-

set as the light dies from the sky. It was a sad parting, but the memory of the place can never now be despoiled of its loveliness. As I write these words, I stand again in the cool and dusky silence of the poet's church, with its air of stately age and its fragrance of cleanliness, while the light of the western sun, broken into rays of gold and ruby, streams through the great painted windows, and softly falls upon the quaint little galleries and decorous pews; and looking forth through the low, arched door, I see the dark and melancholy boughs of the dreaming yew tree, and, nearer, a shadow of rippling leaves in the clear sunshine of the church-way path, and all the time a quiet voice is whispering, in the chambers of thought—

“No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,  
(There they alike in trembling hope repose,)  
The bosom of his Father and his God.”

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## HISTORY OF THE POEM.

Mackintosh says: “Of all English poets, he was the most finished artist. He attained the highest kind of splendor of which poetical style seems capable.” “Almost all Gray's poetry was lyrical—that species which, issuing from the mind in the highest state of excitement, requires an intensity of feeling which, for a long composition, the genius of no poet could support.” Gray's prose is to be studied in his letters, in which “he has shown the descriptive powers of a poet, and in new combinations of generally familiar words he was eminently happy.”

Not until 1742 did Gray begin seriously to write. At this time there were only a few considerable poets. Pope and Swift were closing their careers. Goldsmith and Cowper were not yet before the public. The *Vicar of Wakefield* appeared twenty-four years later. Young was just beginning to publish his only immortal work, the *Night Thoughts*. Thomson was enjoying the undisturbed celebrity of his *Seasons*, completed 1730. He died in 1748. Samuel Johnson, several years older, outlived Gray a dozen years. They were mutually repellent throughout their lives, and after Gray's death Johnson damned him with faint praise and more censure in his *Lives of the Poets*. Between him and his contemporaries there was little friendship. Gray's personal peculiarities kept him aloof. If there was any inspiration in the times, Gray did not come in contact with it. His own Muse was of too retired a nature to arouse or communicate any great fire. Arnold says: “Born in the same year with Milton, Gray would have been another man; born in the same year with Burns, he would have been another man.” To which Gosse adds: “As it was, his genius pined away for want of nourishment in the atmosphere; the wells of poetry were stagnant and there was no angel to strike the waters.”

The history of the ELEGY is briefly as follows: The death of his uncle, Jonathan Rogers, in 1742, incited him to its beginning. The death of his

aunt, Mary Antrobus, in 1749, seven years after he had begun it, the second stimulus, led to its completion. "He finished it, as he began it, at Stoke Pogis, giving the last touches to it on 12th of June, 1750." "Having put an end to a thing whose beginning you had seen long ago," he writes on that day to Horace Walpole, "I immediately send it to you. You will, I hope, look upon it in the light of a thing with an end to it, a merit that most of my writings have wanted and are like to want."

"Walpole's enthusiasm for the ELEGY IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD led him to commit the grave indiscretion of handing it from friend to friend, and even of distributing manuscript copies of it, without Gray's cognizance."

"On the 10th of February, 1751, he (Gray) received a rather impertinently civil letter from the publisher of a periodical called the *Magazine of Magazines*, coolly informing him that he was actually printing his ingenious poem called REFLECTIONS IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD, and praying for his indulgence and the honor of his correspondence! Gray immediately wrote to Horace Walpole (Feb. 11): 'As I am not disposed to be either so indulgent or so correspondent as they desire, I have but one bad way left to escape the honor they would inflict upon me, and therefore am obliged to desire you to make Dodsley print it immediately (which may be done in less than a week's time) from your copy, but without my name, in what form is most convenient for him, but on his best paper and character; he must correct the press himself, and print it without an interval between the stanzas, because the sense is in some places continued without them.' All this was done with extraordinary promptitude, and five days after this letter of Gray's, on the 16th of February, 1751, Dodsley published a large quarto pamphlet, anonymous, price sixpence, entitled AN ELEGY WRITTEN IN A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD. It was preceded by a short advertisement, not signed, but written by Horace Walpole."

On the margin of the MS. preserved in Pembroke College, Cambridge, Gray cites fifteen authorized editions between 1751 and 1753. Its pirated editions were countless. The *Magazine of Magazines* persisted, although Gray had been neither indulgent nor correspondent, and the poem appeared in the issue for February, published, as was then the habit of periodicals, on the last of that month. The *London Magazine* stole it for its issue for March, and the *Grand Magazine of Magazines* copied it in April. Everybody read it in town and country; Shenstone, far away from the world of books, had seen it before the 28th of March. It achieved a complete popular success from the very first, and the name of its author gradually crept into notoriety. The success of his poem, however, brought him little direct satisfaction, and no money. He gave the right of publication to Dodsley, as he did in all other instances. He had a Quixotic notion that it was beneath a gentleman to take money for his inventions from a bookseller, a view in which Dodsley warmly coincided; and it was stated by another bookseller, who, after Gray's death, quarreled with Mason, (a friend designated by the poet in his will as his biographer,) that Dodsley was known to have made nearly a thousand pounds by the poetry of Gray.

"It is curious to reflect upon the modest and careless mode in which that poem was first circulated, which was destined to enjoy and to retain a higher reputation in literature than any other English poem, perhaps than any other poem in the world, written between Milton and Wordsworth. The fame of the ELEGY has spread to all countries and has exercised an influence on all the poetry of Europe, from Denmark to Italy, from France to Russia. With the exception of certain works of Byron and Shakespeare, no English poem has been so widely admired and imitated abroad; and after more than a century of existence, we find it as fresh as ever, when its copies, even the most popular of all, Lamartine's *Le Lac*, are faded and tarnished. It is possessed of incomparable felicity, of a melody that is not too subtle to charm every ear, of a moral persuasiveness that appeals to every generation, and of metrical skill that in each line proclaims the master. The ELEGY may almost be looked upon as the typical piece of English verse, our poem of poems; not that it is the most brilliant or original or profound lyric in our language, but because it combines in more balanced perfection than any other all the qualities that go to the production of a fine poetical effect. The successive criticism of a swarm of Dryasdusts, each depositing his drop of siccative, the boundless vogue and consequent profanation of stanza upon stanza, the changes of fashion, the familiarity that breeds contempt; all these have not succeeded in destroying the vitality of this humane and stately poem."

"We may well leave to its fate a poem with so splendid a history, a poem more thickly studded with phrases that have become a part and parcel of colloquial speech, than any other piece, even of Shakespeare, consisting of so few consecutive lines."

This account of the ELEGY is almost entirely extracted from the latest, best, and most charming of the myriads of biographies of Thomas Gray—one of the Morley series of *English Men of Letters*, written by Edmund W. Gosse, published by Harper and Brothers.

Enough has now been said to impress upon our minds the marvel of literature which we are about to study. Let us remember, as we lovingly daintier about its every word and line and stanza, that we sup literary dainties which have delighted "kings, the powerful of earth; the wise, the good, fair forms, and hoary peers of ages past."

## ELEGY TO WHOM?

An elegy is defined as a song of lamentation, in which the writer praises the life and mourns the death of some one. Does this poem meet this close definition? Many of the commentators say not. It is cited by rhetoricians as an illustration of the use of the word elegy, with a production where merely a tinge of melancholy pervades the sentiments, and grief is not actually expressed.

The word elegy is properly applied by Gray to this poem. He has celebrated in it the life and the death of "the rude forefathers of the hamlet." Upon the humble character of the subjects of his poem depends

mainly its popularity, not on its literary perfection. The *Odes to Eton College*, and *Adversity*, have quite as much felicity of phrase and technical elegance, yet are scarcely read. The ELEGY, so far as its expression is concerned, is not popular or easy to the ordinary reader. Compared with Longfellow's *The Day is Done*, or *The Bridge*, its style is that of a person who has a "strutting dignity," and is tall by walking on tip-toe. It is so full of artistic perfection as to be utterly beyond the reach of most people when they read it first, and of a great many when they read it last. Yet it is readable, and the multitude do receive from it pleasing impressions; but their impressions come, we think, not so much from literary appreciation, as from the sentiment aroused throughout the poem, that "unhonor'd dead" are being praised, and, most of the time, at the expense of the more fortunate classes.

While the "growing virtues" of this humble people, though repressed by chill penury and born to blush unseen, are magnified into infinite possibilities; the haughty creatures of luxury and pride are, by contrast, credited with crimes unconfined, thrones reached through slaughter, and quenched blushes of ingenuous shame.

This building oneself up by pulling some one else down, is ever a pleasing sensation to the average person, and however ignoble the sentiment, it is elegantly appealed to in this poem, and is really the foundation of much of its popularity.

Yet, the surviving impression in the mind of the average reader is, that a class, hitherto neglected by those who burn incense kindled at the Muse's flame, are here paid a beautiful tribute by one who represents himself as preferring to relate their artless tale, rather than to further "heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride."

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## PRELIMINARY SURVEY.

Let the reader now pass through the entire structure, gathering a complete view of it as a whole, leaving the careful examination of its parts to another more deliberate excursion.

*The Introduction.*—The first four stanzas, in which the time and place of the meditations are set forth, form an appropriate introduction to the coming discussion, the theme of which is stated in the last line of the 4th stanza.

*Their Lives Described.*—The daily routine of the rude forefathers is graphically pictured in the next three stanzas (5-7). The 5th, a lovely morning scene; the 6th, a touching evening picture; the 7th, their outdoor pursuits.

*The Record of their Lives worthy of Attention.*—In the 8th and 9th stanzas, the poet claims that these humble lives should receive the respectful consideration of the ambitious and the proud on the singular grounds that all

"Await alike the inevitable hour;

a plea which, perhaps, is more common than forcible; and made here with more of beauty than of logic.

*Their Names worthy of Remembrance, though Memory has raised no Trophies over their Tombs.*—In the next ten stanzas (10-19) is a popular eulogy upon, and a defence of, their lives, against any lack of appreciation which might result from the absence of those monumental memorials which usually mark the tombs of honored dead.

*Yet even These are the Recipients of Memorial Honors.*—Having thus shown that the absence of “storied urn,” or “animated bust,” is not to be interpreted to their discredit, in the next four stanzas he calls attention to the fact that some of these poor people are moved with instincts common to all mankind, and have also memorials, though frail, erected to their names.

*Gray Describes Himself.*—The common interpretation of the rest of the poem is, that Gray, dropping the consideration of these humble people, modestly sets forth his own appearance and character, as the one

“Who, mindful of th' unhonor'd dead,  
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate.”

In the 26th and 27th stanzas he describes his life; in the 28th and 29th, his death and burial; in the next three, his epitaph.

There are those who maintain that this interpretation is entirely wrong, and that these lines refer to the “unletter'd muse,” mentioned in the 21st stanza. In support of this opinion, it is urged that the unity of the poem is beautifully maintained in thus selecting the only literary character of the hamlet as the object of description and an epitaph, while the unity is utterly destroyed if we suppose Gray to suddenly cease his attentions to his rude proteges, in order to thrust himself into consideration, and so, as it were, receive upon himself the stream of sympathies which he had aroused by means of these poor people. The reasonableness of this view is left to the reader.

*Note to Teacher.*—Let the class, as one lesson, make this “preliminary survey” and bring it in, in outline, for a special recitation. They should, of course, have no reference to this text, as it is intended as a special help to the teacher.

## THE POEM.

1. The curfew tolls the knell of 'parting day,  
    The lowing herd winds slowly o'er the lea;  
    The plowman homeward plods his weary way,  
    And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

**PICTURES.**—Poetry is most poetical when it pictures vividly. The ELEGY is remarkable for this. Every stanza is a word painting. Let the students point out what they see in each one. If permitted, many of them will draw, on the slate, or paper, or blackboard, illustrations of the differ-

ent stanzas. Attempts by the pupils to form 'tableaux from the poem will develop its imagery, and supply material for a beautiful evening party entertainment. To encourage the pupils in these efforts, let them understand that the best artistic skill has been devoted to illustrating the ELEGY.

*Curfew* :—(Written also *curfew*, and *courrefeu*, the latter being the French for *cover the fire*.) A signal, usually by tolling a bell, to warn inhabitants to extinguish their fires and lights, and to retire to rest. This was a common practice throughout England during the Middle Ages. It is commonly said to have been introduced into England by William I., the Norman conqueror, who ordained it under severe penalties. He probably, however, only enforced an existing and very common police regulation to that effect. It was ostensibly a precaution against conflagrations, which were frequent and destructive at that period, when it was the custom to place the fire in a hole in the middle of the floor, under an opening in the roof through which the smoke escaped, the houses being chiefly composed of wood and straw. But it was quite as likely that it was to prevent nocturnal brawls, and secret assemblies for planning schemes of rebellion against a tyrannical ruler. The severity with which William enforced it seems to indicate this. The absolute prohibition of lights was abolished by Henry I., 1100. But the practice of tolling a bell at a fixed hour in the evening still prevails in many parts of England and Scotland. The common hour was seven, but it has gradually advanced to eight and nine o'clock. In Scotland ten was not an unusual hour. Its original significance is now, of course, entirely lost, and it serves rather the purpose of a town clock. The practice has lately been revived in its original force in Ireland, as a measure of the British Government to prevent nocturnal risings. This revival at this time, for such a purpose, shows its real original import.

*Knell* :—The slow notes of a funeral bell. How prettily applied to the dying day.

*Parting* :—*i. e.*, Departing.

*Lea* :—A meadow, field. An old English word, spelled variously, *lay*, *ley*, *leigh*, etc.; as *Layham*, *Horley*, *Leighton*, *Headleigh*, *Leigh*.

*The plowman's way* :—Notice the two examples of alliteration: *Plowman*, *plods*; *wairy way*. So Longfellow, in his "Evangeline":

" And lo! with summons sonorous sounded the bell from its tower."

And again in the same:

" As, when the air is serene in the sultry solstice of summer,  
Suddenly gathers a storm."

The words of this line are susceptible of over twenty different positions without destroying the rhythm, general sentiment, or rhyming word. Let the pupils practice.

*PROSODY*.—Each stanza is called a *quatrain*, because it consists of four lines. The meter is *iambic pentameter*, because each line consists of five feet (pentameter), each foot being composed of two syllables, the second of which is accented (*iambus*).

2. Now fades the glimm'ring landscape on the sight ;  
     And all the air a solemn stillness holds,  
     Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,  
     And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds.

**EPITHETS.**—Gray is celebrated for his use of epithets, that is, of adjectives specially qualifying nouns. Some of his critics say that he uses them to excess. Would this stanza be stronger without “glimmering,” “solemn,” “droning,” “drowsy,” or “distant?” Let the pupil read the stanza without them.

**Fades** :—The position of this verb is poetical. The line could have been written :

“The glimm'ring landscape fades now on the sight ;”

but how commonplace and prosy.

**Glimm'ring** :—To shine faintly. Pupils, look it up in dictionary, and make sentences with it. Applied to the landscape because it is dimly visible after sunset.

**Landscape** :—Subject of “fades.”

**Solemn** :—A beautiful epithet, which really personifies “stillness,” for only a person can be solemn.

**Air** :—Better parse as the object of “holds,” because more poetical. It permits of the inverted order of the words, and implies that “stillness,” as a person, presides over the air.

**Save** :—For except. A verb originally, but a preposition here, showing the relation between the two lines “where the beetle—folds” and “holds.” Except is also a verb used as a preposition.

**Where** :—An interrogative adverb, modifying “wheels.”

**Beetle** :—The May-beetle, door-beetle or cockchafer, which flies about on summer evenings. Its grub remains in the ground three years before coming to its complete state, during which time it is so voracious that it does great injury to the roots of grass and trees.

**Droning** :—A drone is a bee that does not work; hence, a lazy, idle fellow; a sluggard; a sluggish fellow; hence, a sluggish, monotonous, huming sound. Longfellow speaks of the “monstrous drone of the wheel.” The Scotch call the largest tube of the bagpipe the drone. Thus “droning flight” is a humming or buzzing flight.

**Drowsy** :—Another very suggestive epithet; adding effectually to the sense of quiet which the poet is throwing over the scene.

**Tinklings** :—Of the sheep-bells; the oldest ram (bell-wether) of a flock has a bell strapped about his neck, the sound of which keeps the flock together.

**Distant** :—Who has not experienced every feature of this lovely evening scene, when, in the subdued quiet, the only sounds are those of lowing herds, distant folds, droning insects, etc.

**THE PICTURE.**—Let the pupils carefully pick out the objects and conditions added to the picture by this stanza.

3. Save that from yonder ivy-mantl'd tow'r,  
    The moping owl does to the moon complain  
Of such as, wand'ring near her secret bow'r,  
    Molest her ancient, solitary reign.

THE PICTURE.—The ivy-mantled tower, with its owl hooting to the moon, are added features to the peaceful evening scene, which was begun in the first stanza and which is completed in the fourth.

*Save* :—As in the second stanza, a preposition, meaning *except*, and having for its object all the rest of the stanza. The complaining of the moping owl, with the tinklings of the distant folds and the droning flight of the beetle, are the exceptions to the statement that “all the air a solemn stillness holds.”

*That* :—Introductory conjunction.

*Ivy-mantl'd* :—A beautiful epithet, meaning that the tower is covered with ivy as with a mantle or cloak.

*Moping Owl* :—A very suitable epithet for the owl, which sits through the day as if dull or out of spirits, waiting for the dusk or night. Since its eyes are so constructed that it can see better at dusk than in full daylight, it chooses dark places to live in. Its solemn, moping appearance makes it the type of disgruntled wiseacres.

*To the moon complain* :—The imagination of the poet easily interprets the hootings of the owl as complaints addressed to the moon, the queen of the night, prettily assigning as grounds of complaint the passers-by who disturb her, and perhaps frighten away the mice on which she feeds.

*As* :—Is here a relative pronoun, having for its antecedent “persons” understood, after “such,” and being the subject of “molest.”

*Her* :—Antecedent “owl.”

*Reign* :—Here used in the sense of *realm* or *kingdom*, not of *rule*.

4. Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,  
    Where heave's the turf in many a mould'ring heap,  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,  
    The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

THE PICTURE.—In this stanza is completed the beautiful, natural scene which forms the introduction to the subject proper of the poem. The objects which strike the eye, though faintly, are the departing day, the lowing herd, the lea, the plowman, the poet, the fading landscape, the distant folds, the ivy-mantled tower of the venerable church, the moon lighting up the churchyard and its rugged elms, yew-tree, mouldering heaps, and their humble head-stones. The objects which strike the ear are the curfew's toll, the lowing of the herd, the droning of the beetle, the drowsy tinklings, the complaining of the owl—sounds which gently intensify the quietness of the scene.

*Beneath* :—Shows the relation of “elms” and “shade” to “sleep.”

*Those rugged elms* :—Note how the word “those” seats us beside the poet, whose meditations upon the beautiful surroundings we quietly share.

*Yew-tree* :—An evergreen tree (*Taxus baccata*), allied to the pines, valued for its wood or timber. It frequently occurs in British graveyards. The American yew is a low, straggling bush, which never has an ascending trunk, while the British yew-tree is thirty to forty feet high, with a trunk of great thickness, which branches a few feet above the ground, forming a large, dense shade. It attains great age, at least 200 to 400 years. Its wood has been much used from very early time for making bows, for which it is preferred to any other kind of wood. It is very hard, and reckoned almost equal to boxwood for fine work. The heart-wood is of an orange-red or deep brown color. The fruit is red, and was long reputed poisonous, but the pulpy part is not so; the seed, however, is a dangerous poison. The leaves are a powerful narcotic.

*Heaves* :—Here used intransitively, its subject is “turf.”

*Heap* :—That is, over the graves. How beautifully the swellings of the ground, which mark the grave, are indicated by the turf heaving into heaps!

*Each* :—That is, each of the “forefathers.”

*Narrow cell* :—That is, the grave.

*Rude* :—*Rustic* or *unpolished*, not necessarily *impudent* or *insolent* or *vulgar*.

*Hamlet* :—A small village, a cluster of houses. *Ham* is Saxon for *home*, as in *Oakham*, *Buckingham*, etc.; *let* is a diminutive suffix, making the word mean literally *little home*.

*Forefathers* :—In this word is contained the subject of the poem, a theme which has added more to its popularity than all its literary beauties.

5. The breezy call of incense-breathing Morn,  
The swallows, twittering from the straw-built shed,  
The cock's shrill clarion, or the echoing horn,  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

INTRODUCTORY.—Now begins a description of the lives of these humble people, which is completed in this and the two following stanzas. Let the pupils look for every feature of these homes here set forth. It is wonderful how full and yet brief is the picture. It is full, because of what it suggests; it is brief, because suggestive.

*Breezy call* :—The first impressions of the morning upon a sleeping person are prettily interpreted as a “call,” and the morning zephyrs as a “breezy” call.

*Incense-breathing* :—Laden with the sweet perfumes of flowers. Incense is the gums and spices, or the odors coming from them when burned, used in religious ceremonies. Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, iv, 641, says, “Sweet is the breath of morn.”

**Morn** :—Some of the most beautiful passages in the language are those descriptive of morning, and in most of these it is personified. The most celebrated of morning hymns is the one written by Bishop Thomas Ken (1637-1711), beginning:

“Awake, my soul, and with the sun,”

one stanza of which is the familiar long meter doxology,

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow,” etc.

**Clarion** :—A kind of trumpet which gives a shriller and clearer sound than the common one. It is here used metaphorically for the crowing of the cock.

**Horn** :—Probably some hunter's horn.

**Rouse** :—Point out the four subjects (call, swallow, clarion, horn) of this verb.

**Bed** :—This, of course, refers to the bed in which the fathers slept during life, not to their graves. The words “no more,” in the fourth line, settle it. The breezy call, swallows, etc., had never *before* roused them from their graves, and, hence, “no more shall rouse” would be inappropriate. It would seem unnecessary to make this, and many similar explanations, but my experience, as a teacher, has revealed the fact that even teachers of considerable standing will be found to argue, that “bed” does refer to the “narrow cell” mentioned in the fourth stanza, as well as for other equally erroneous views, the correction of which requires only one intelligent reading.

In such passages as these, where incorrect interpretations are possible, let the teacher carefully withhold his own opinion and encourage pupils of different opinions to defend their interpretations by conclusions drawn from the text. After reasonable discussion, take a vote of the class as to which is right. Assure them that there is but one possible view. If possible, let the correct reading be reached by independent investigation and discussion of the class. It will be well, oftentimes, for the teacher to withhold his decision until the next recitation, so that the pupils may have further time to consider.

These discussions and disputed interpretations are the most important features of the reading class. In them will be aroused a spirit of curious investigation, close interpretation and keen, original appreciation, which are the only possible foundations of a genuine literary taste.

6. For them no more the blazing hearth shall burn,  
Or busy housewife ply her evening care;  
No children run to lisp their sire's return,  
Or climb his knees the envid' kiss to share.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—The beautiful morning scene pictured in the preceding stanza is followed now with an evening home scene. See the cheerful fire, the busy mother, with her children, expecting the father; his return from the day's labors, the clamorous welcome, his complete appro-

priation by the children while the supper is being placed upon the table or the mother plies the spinning wheel.

**For** :—Shows the relation between “them” and “burn” and “ply.”

**Them** :—The rude forefathers.

**Housewife** :—How words originate is illustrated in the following evolution of “hussey” from “housewife,” given by Morris. Housewife was sometimes written “huswife,” and then contracted into “hussif,” meaning a case for needles and thread; and “hussy,” or “huzzy,” a wench woman, now used in an uncomplimentary sense, though originally not so.

**Evening care** :—What is referred to here is disputed. Some say needle-work, others spinning, others some evening occupation. Swinton quotes Hales as remarking that “this is probably the kind of phrase that caused Wordsworth to pronounce the language of the ELEGY unintelligible.” Swinton also says: “Wordsworth, in the following direct manner, conveys the thought which Gray thus veils:

“‘ And she I cherished turned her wheel  
Beside an English fire.’ ”

**Run to lisp** :—At this point it will be well to call attention to Burns’ celebrated poem, *Cotter’s Saturday Night*, which very plainly shows the influence of Gray’s ELEGY. Let the teacher read it, or a portion of it at a time, in connection with the ELEGY. I quote the third stanza in full, which the teacher may, with his pupils, compare and contrast with the home scene of the ELEGY:

“ At length his lowly cot appears in view,  
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;  
Th’ expectant wee things, toddlin’, stacher through  
To meet their dad, wi’ blichterin’ noise and glee.  
His wee bit ingle blinking bonnily,  
His clean heartstane, his thriftie wife’s smile,  
The lisping infant prattling on his knee,  
Does n’ his weary kninch and care begnile,  
And makes him quite forget his labor and his toil,”

(*Wee, little; stacher, stagger; toddlin’, walking with short steps; blichterin’, fluttering; inge, fire-place; kninch, anxiety.*)

**Sire** :—Is a French word for knight or lord. It commonly means father but is often used as a title of respect, especially in addressing a king. Sir is an abbreviation of sire.

**To lisp—to share** :—Are two infinitives, having the construction of adverbs, limiting “run” and “climb,” respectively.

7. Oft did the harvest to their sickle yield,  
Their furrow oft the stubborn glebe has broke;  
How jocund did they drive their team afield!  
How bow’d the woods beneath their sturdy stroke.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—Here are set forth various outdoor occupations of the rude forefathers. Let the pupils determine how many. Let the pupils translate each line into their own language.

**To** :—Shows relation between “sickle” and “yield.”

**Furrow** :—Used metaphorically for plow; it is the subject of “broke.”

**Stubborn** :—Is treated very interestingly by Morris, as follows: Hard to be turned up with a plough. A stub is a short, thick stock of a tree or other plant, left when the rest is cut off, and is the same word as stump. Stubble is derived from this word, the *le* being what is called a frequentative termination, and denoting that a great many stubs are met with in the stubble. Stubborn means like a stub, *i. e.*, stiff, unbending, obstinate.

**Glebe** :—Ground; subject of “broke.”

**How, etc.** :—Note the change of sentence; the first two declarative, the second two exclamatory; thus giving liveliness to the stanza.

**Jocund** :—An adjective used for an adverb by a common poetical license. Here show what “license” in the use of language means. It is the violation of ordinary usage to meet the demands of verse or circumstances. Here *jocundly* would have ruined the meter of the line, hence the poet dared to be guilty of a bad usage, knowing that any intelligent critic would comprehend the necessities of the case, and so not condemn.

**Afield** :—Is an adverb, composed of the old English prefix *a*, meaning *to*, *at* or *on*, as seen in *abed*, *aboard*, *ashore*, *ajar* (so said of a door which is in such a position that a slight movement, a jar, will close it).—*Morris*.

**Bow'd** :—Beautifully used for “fell.”

8. Let not ambition mock their useful toil,  
    Their homely joys, their destiny obscure;  
Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,  
    The short and simple annals of the poor.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—Two divisions of the poem are now completed. First, the introduction, including stanzas 1-4; second, the description of the morning (5), evening (6), and day (7) vocations of the rude forefathers, 5-7. Now begins a succession of comparisons and contrasts between their lives and the lives of more pretentious classes, with shrewd hints, prejudicial to the latter and complimentary to the former.

Let the pupils discover and enjoy these artful turns, and determine whether or not they are sophistical or really truthful. As I have said before, this skillful defence and vindication of the humbler classes is really the popular feature of the poem.

This stanza is introductory to this line of procedure. The poet implies that, as his readers have discovered the humble character of the theme, they will be disposed to turn away with impatience and disappointment that he has not undertaken something more grand and heroic. He therefore begs these Ambitious and Grand readers not to treat with mockery these “homely joys,” nor listen with a “disdainful smile” to a simple narration of the every-day doings of these people of so obscure a destiny. This implication that his humble heroes are being snubbed,

and that he is ready to magnify them in the face of sneering haughtiness, at once arouses spite at the "unworthy," and sympathy for "patient merit."

**Ambition:**—Used metaphorically for "ambitious persons." The figure is Synecdoche. The etymology of "ambition" is curious. It means a desire for honor or power, but the meaning would hardly indicate its origin. It is from two Latin words, *ambi*, about, and *eo*, *itum*, going. Strictly, therefore, it means "going about," referring to Roman citizens going up and down the city asking for votes. As such persons were clad in white they were called *candidati*, from *candidus*, white. Hence our word, candidate. "Ambition" is objective, subject of "[to hear]."

**Grandeur:**—Used for "grand persons." See "ambition."

**Toil—smile; obscure—poor:**—That the thought suggests the rhyme, and not the rhyme the thought, is shown in these imperfect rhymes.

9. The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r,  
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,  
Await alike the inevitable hour:  
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—This stanza is a spirited rebuke of the implied haughtiness of the first stanza. In homely phrase the argument runs thus: "You grand people need not put on so many airs. With all your pride of ancestry (heraldry), of position (power), of personal attraction (beauty), of wealth, you have to die, just as do these humble people. Though different now, yet will soon be on a level at the grave."

**Heraldry:**—In countries where royalty and rank are maintained, a Herald is one who, going before a procession of persons, proclaims their coming, their rank, etc. Consequently, the Herald is familiar with the rank, and so the genealogies of all distinguished persons. To keep these correctly they are recorded in books. This study and record of the genealogies of persons of blood is very important, and takes the rank of a science, which science is called "Heraldry." The "boast of Heraldry" means, therefore, pride of ancestry.

**Heraldry, power, beauty, wealth:**—Notice the inclusiveness of this enumeration. First, consequence is a result of pure blood; next, of power attained by merit or otherwise; next, the influence of beauty; finally and lowest, the claims of wealth.

**Inevitable hour:**—Death. These three lines indicate how a poet expresses the common idea, "We must all die."

**Paths of glory:**—From all time, military glory has ranked highest in the estimation of men. The poet, therefore, makes it the culmination of his catalogue, and to strengthen the climax gives to it a sentence and a line.

**CONCLUSION.**—Of all the poem, this and the fourteenth stanzas are the most quoted. This, because of its solemn impressiveness; that, because of its consolation to "the unappreciated," (to which class we all belong, of course).

Some familiar American history is connected with this stanza. During the French and Indian War, 1754-63, the gallant Wolfe, whom the great Pitt singled out as the Englishman to thrash the French off the American continent, was, with his men, silently descending the St. Lawrence to capture Quebec, (which when taken, all was taken from the French,) "repeated, in a low tone to the other officers in his boat, those beautiful stanzas with which a country church-yard inspired the muse of Gray, and at the close of the recitation said: 'Now, gentlemen, I would rather be the author of that poem than take Quebec.'"<sup>\*</sup> In a few hours he and Montcalm verified the noble line,

"The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

- 10.** Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,  
If Mem'ry o'er their tomb no trophies raise,  
Where, thro' the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault,  
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—Let the teacher now request the class to read silently this stanza, and from their own investigation determine what line of procedure the poet is pursuing. Is it continuous of the preceding or a departure? Is he still attacking the higher classes in order to defend the lower? If so, what is the peculiar boast of superiority which he supposes them to make? Does he reply to them in this stanza? Does he say anything for the humbler classes in this stanza?

**Nor:**—"Let *not* ambition" (8, 1), "*Nor* grandeur" (8, 3), "*Nor* you, ye proud."

**You:**—Subject of "impute."

**Ye proud:**—Having rebuked the Ambitious (8, 1), and the Grand (8, 3), for their supposed disdain for the humbleness of his theme, he now supposes that certain "proud" (9, 1) persons would scorn these "rude forefathers," because, in the grave-yard, here, there are no magnificent monuments erected over their tombs, and because at their funeral there was no great display of ceremonial pomp.

**Impute:**—Charge with, accuse of, censure for, blame for.

**Fault:**—That is, the "proud" might consider it a "fault," but the poet soon indicates that it is not. The last three lines define "fault," and may be considered in apposition with it.

**Mem'ry:**—Subject of raise. Used metaphorically for "Persons in memory of." It is also personified, as the capital indicates. The apostrophe indicates an elision of a syllable to make two, instead of three.

**O'er:**—Shows relation of "tomb" to "raise." The apostrophe indicates the loss of another syllable to preserve the measure. Were these two words, "memory" and "over," given in full, there would be in the line twelve syllables, where there should be only ten. Let the pupils read the line with and without the elisions, accenting every second syllable.

\*Quoted by Swinton from Lord Mahon's *History of England*.

**Their:**—That is, the forefathers whose tombs are supposed, throughout the poem, to be in view.

**Trophies:**—Memorials of a victory. In Canterbury Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and many other cathedrals, celebrated dead are buried; and in the case of warriors, their trophies, or their own arms, are placed over their tombs.

**Raise:**—This word is very shrewdly chosen; both with reference to the rhyme, and to avoid commonplace. Let the pupils choose another word which will express the thought and rhyme.

**Where:**—That is, in some cathedral.

**Thro':**—Shows the relation of "aisle" and "vault" to "swells." Abbreviated for typographical purposes. Oftentimes spelled in full.

**Long-drawn aisle:**—Of a cathedral or other large church, alluding to what is commonly called Gothic, but is more properly known as Early English Architecture.—*Morris & Stevens.*

**Fretted vault**—An arched roof (vault), ornamented with fret-work, that is, with bands or fillets crossing each other in different patterns.

**Anthem:**—A song of praise, alluding to the music which from voice and organ usually aids in the funeral ceremonies.

11. Can storied urn, or animated bust,  
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?  
Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust,  
Or Flatt'ry soothe the dull, cold ear of death?

**INTRODUCTORY.**—This stanza is another "defence" of the rude "forefathers" against the "faults" "imputed" to them in the preceding stanza (just as was the ninth a reply to the eighth), the general charge being, that no honors attended their burial.

**Storied urn:**—In this first line two ancient methods of honoring their dead are mentioned: the *urn* and the *bust*. Among the Grecians and Romans it was customary to burn their dead, and preserve their ashes in beautifully sculptured urns, on the outside of which was, oftentimes, wrought in pictures and verse, the story of the life of the person whose ashes they contained, hence the "storied urn."

This custom may be revived in modern times, as cremation (burning the dead) is growing in favor.

**Animated bust:**—The sculptured bust is as familiar to these times as it was to ancients. *Animated*, that is, lifelike.

As one feature of a public entertainment, once given by my high school pupils, they prepared their own original tableaux of scenes in this poem. All of them were serious, excepting one, which was prepared by the wit of the class. He presented himself to the audience in very dilapidated apparel, fondly caressing a lamp-post, which was evidently necessary to his maintaining an equilibrium. This was his version of an "animated bust."

**To** :—Shows the relation between “mansion” and “call.”

**Mansion** :—That is, the body, which is the abode of the soul.

**Call** :—Agrees with its subjects “urn” and “bust.”

**Fleeting** :—That is, departing.

**Breath** :—The soul.

PARAPHRASE.—Let the pupils change into their own words this sentence, filling out the argument of the poet. They will produce something as follows: “Can the fact that you superior people have storied urns and elegant sculptures to mark your death, add one moment to your life? In spite of these advantages, must you not die just as these common people?”

THE INTERROGATIVE FORM.—Note the superior force of the question over a declaration. Let the pupils change to declarative. As with this, so with the next and many following sentences.

**Provoke** :—Used here in its primitive meaning. *Pro*, forth, and *voco*, I call; hence, *call forth*.

**Silent dust** :—The dead body, or its ashes in the urn.

PARAPHRASES.—Can all the honors which those in high life receive, raise them from the dead? Hence, what great advantage do they afford which the humbler poor do not possess when they die?

**Or death** :—This line needs no comment, except to note its beauty.

CONCLUSION.—The poet evidently makes little progress in the defence, as he practically repeats, though in delightful variety of phrase, the point made in the ninth stanza. Yet this is a beautiful quatrain. Not one word of it would we surrender. Call attention to the *classical* air given to the stanza by the allusion to the ancient urn, also to the beautiful drapery which the poet has thrown around the commonplace references to death. Encourage them to utilize these allusions and images in their conversation and compositions. To be able to use in other connections this “storied urn,” and “animated bust,” “fleeting breath,” or “dull, cold ear,” would imply culture which all intelligent persons would promptly recognize and respect.

12. Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid  
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;  
Hands that the rod of empire might have sway'd  
Or wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre.

INTRODUCTORY.—Having made a species of defence or vindication of the “rude forefathers” as to what they were compared with more fortunate classes, the poet now begins an ingenious line of vindication by suggesting what they *might have been*, if—

Let the pupils discover that this argument closes with Stanza 19. Let the pupils also discuss before and after the reading of this argument, whether “circumstances make the man, or man the circumstances.” So

help to determine the validity and force of this argument in behalf of the rude forefathers.

*Neglected spot:*—The church-yard, *Stoke Pogis*, the reputed scene of the poem, in which the poet is supposed to be while writing. It is said, though, that it was really written at Grantchester, a little parish near Cambridge.

*Celestial fire:*—The gift of poetry, which was supposed to be sent from heaven to the gods; or it may mean talent generally. In the old mythology, Prometheus is said to have made the figure of man with clay, and to have animated it with fire, which, with the assistance of Minerva, he brought down from heaven. As a punishment for this, Jupiter chained him to Mount Caucasus, with a vulture perpetually gnawing at his liver.—*Morris & Stevens*.

Hence, any remarkable gift of genius possessed by a man is frequently spoken of as a "divine gift," "heavenly inspiration," "celestial fire."

PARAPHRASE OF FIRST TWO LINES.—Perhaps there are buried in this unknown church-yard persons who might have been poets or some other kind of genius.

*Hands:*—Subject of "is laid."

*Rod of empire:*—The sceptre of a king.

*Sway'd:*—The apostrophe indicates the elision of "e," or the consolidation of the word into one syllable, to make one foot. It is understood in poetry, that whenever the syllable "ed" is written in full, it must be pronounced separately to make a foot. So if "sway'd" had been written swayed, the correct reader would pronounce it sway-ed. The same remarks apply to "wak'd," in last line. The subject of "sway'd" is "that" referring to hands.

*Wak'd:*—Subject "that," in third line, referring to hands.

*Living lyre:*—Morris & Stevens make the following comment here: "Any musical instrument of the nature of a harp. By living lyre is probably meant one which gives forth peculiarly sweet sounds under the hands of a skillful performer." The italicized portion we dissent from. It more probably refers to the human heart when moved by the impassioned eloquence of an orator.

PARAPHRASE OF LAST TWO LINES.—Or (perhaps there are buried in this unknown spot) persons who might have been powerful rulers or popular orators, or, according to Morris & Stevens, talented musicians.

CONCLUSION.—Thus having suggested what these people might have been, we must look to the next stanza for the "it."

13. But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page,  
Rich with the spoils of Time did ne'er unroll;  
Chill penury repressed their noble rage,  
And froze the genial current of the soul.

INTRODUCTORY.—In this stanza are presented the reasons why these people were not something grand, as indicated in the preceding stanza.

*Knowledge* :—Personified, and so capitalized.

*Amples* :—That is, including a vast number of subjects.

*Page* :—Object of “*unroll*.”

*Spoils* :—As spoils are taken from an enemy in war, so are the various kinds of knowledge wrested in the course of time from our common enemy, Ignorance.

*Unroll* :—Refers to the fact that books, at first, were in rolls, instead of in sheets, as now. “*Volume*” has the same meaning, as it is from the Latin, *volvere*, to roll. “*Unroll*” agrees with its subject, “*knowledge*.”

PARAPHRASE OF LINES 1 AND 2.—But they had no school privileges.

*Penury* :—Personified.

*Repressed their noble rage* :—Poverty crushed out their noble desires.

*Rage* :—Ambition, enthusiasm, grand purpose, or desire.

*Froze* :—Metaphor.

PARAPHRASE OF 3D AND 4TH LINES.—Poverty prevented the carrying out of their lofty ambitions, and chilled and checked the flow of their activities, as frost stays the current of a stream by freezing it.

CONCLUSION.—Let the class now give, in their own language, the substance of this and the preceding stanza. Are lack of educational privileges and poverty insuperable obstacles to success? Is the argument good?

14. Full many a gem of purest ray serene,  
    The dark, unfathomed caves of ocean bear;  
Full many a flow'r is born to blush unseen,  
    And waste its sweetness on the desert air.

*Many a* :—The expression *many a* is an abbreviation for *many of*. Originally it would have stood *many of gems*; *many* being a noun. (Shakespeare so uses it. “A *many* of our bodies.” *Henry IV*, 5, 8. “O, thou fond *many*.” Second part of *Henry IV*, 1, 3. “In *many's* looks.” *Sonnets*. Latimer, in a sermon, says, “A *manye* of us were called together.”) This expression became shortened into *many o' gems*, just as we say What o'clock, for What of the clock? In course of time this *o'* came to be written *a*, as it was pronounced; and at last, the origin of the *a* being forgotten, people thought it incorrect to say *many a gems*, and consequently said *many a gem*.—*Morris & Stevens*. In parsing, *many a* may be parsed as one word and an adjective limiting *gem*, which is singular used for plural. Or *many* may be parsed as a noun, *a* as a preposition, meaning *of*, governing *gem*, used for *gems*, in the objective.

*Of purest ray* :—Perfectly clear in color. *Serene* :—Look at Webster, and see that *clear* is the first meaning of *serene*. *Calm, unruffled, undisturbed*, are second and derived meanings.

*Bear* :—Contain, or possess, or produce.

*Many a flower* :—See *many a* above.

*Desert*:—Deserted, lonely; not of a desert.

**PARAPHRASE.**—As many brilliant gems are never discovered, and many beautiful flowers bloom where they never are seen, so among these rude people may have been many persons of brilliant parts who needed only to be discovered to have made a great figure in the world.

**CONCLUSION.**—Still a defence of the people. Is it good logic? Is this latent genius theory a sound one?

- 15. Some Village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast  
The little tyrant of his fields withheld;  
Some mute, inglorious Milton here may rest,  
Some Cromwell, guiltless of his country's blood.**

**INTRODUCTORY.**—Still the poet urges that these rude people buried here might have been Hampdens, or Miltons, or Cromwells, had not their “lot forbade.”

**Hampden**:—John Hampden (1594–1647) was a cousin of Cromwell, a leader against Charles I. in the civil war. He was not beheaded by the king, as is frequently said, but was slain in the battle of Chalgrove Field, Oxfordshire, Eng., fighting against his king. “Village-Hampden” is the subject of “rest.”

**That**:—Subject of “withstood.”

**The little tyrant of his fields**:—In the same manner in which John Hampden withstood the cruel oppression of the tyrant, Charles I., so may some one of these humble persons have resisted, with dauntless breast, the exactions of his richer or more powerful neighbor, and so deserved the title, “Village Hampden.”

**Mute**:—That is, dumb; unable to speak or write poetry as did Milton—not because he was not a poet, but because he was not cultivated—his “lot forbade;” he was “born to blush unseen,” etc.

**Inglorious**:—Not disgraceful or infamous, but simply lacking glory and fame.

**Milton**:—John Milton (1608–1674), the greatest of epic poets, the author of “Paradise Lost,” “Paradise Regained,” “L'Allegro,” “Il Penseroso,” “Comus,” etc., was born and died in London. “Milton” is the subject of “rest.”

**Cromwell**:—Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658), a country gentleman, who became member of Parliament for Huntingdon, afterwards leader of the army against Charles I., after the execution of whom, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth (chief in authority) of England. “Cromwell” is the subject of “rest.”

**Guiltless**:—The poet here, in implying that Cromwell was guilty, caters to royal opinion. English poets too frequently do this. Gray may be said in this instance to

“\* \* \* heap the shrine of Luxury and P pride,  
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.”

It remained for Carlyle to stamp out the strong prejudice against Cromwell's heroic character, and to make it fashionable, even in England, to praise him.

CONCLUSION.—Do you believe in this "mute, inglorious Milton" theory?

16. Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,  
    The threats of pain and ruin to despise,  
    To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,  
    And read their hist'ry in a nation's eyes,
17. Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone  
    Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd:  
    Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne  
    And shut the gates of mercy on mankind;

INTRODUCTORY.—In the sixteenth stanza the poet concludes the enumeration of grand possibilities which these humble forefathers might have realized had not their lot forbade. In the seventeenth and eighteenth he shows, by way of contrast, or compensation, how, by reason of their narrow lot, they were not exposed to the temptations, nor guilty of the crimes, which, he implies, too frequently beset and disgrace those of high estate.

*Th' applause* :—The "e" of "the" is elided for the meter. "Applause" is the object of "to command."

*List'ning senates* :—By "senate" is meant Parliament, or any popular or legislative assembly. Their lot forbade or prevented them from appearing as orators before such public bodies and by their eloquence commanding their attention.

*To command* :—Object of "forbade."—17, 1.

*The threats of pain and ruin to despise* :—So also their low estate preserved them from the pain and ruin to which prominent persons are exposed, and which, if they are bold and ambitious, they despise. "To despise" is the object of "forbade."—17, 1.

*To scatter plenty* :—Their lot forbade their being the cause of great national prosperity.—"To scatter" object of "forbade."—17, 1.

*And read their history, &c.*—As the King or Queen, or other great public characters, must read in the faces or eyes of the people the record of approval or disapproval of their deeds.—"Read" (to read) object of "forbade."—17, 1.

*Their lot forbade* :—"To command," "to despise," "to scatter," and (to) "read" are all the objects of "forbade."

*Circumscrib'd* :—Verb, passive, indicative, past, agreeing with "virtues," auxiliary "were" understood.

*Growing virtues* :—The growth of the virtues.

*Confin'd* :—Nor were their growing virtues alone circumscribed, but their crimes were confined by their lot.

*Forbade* :—Agrees with “lot” understood. Their lot forbade them to wade, &c.

*To wade through slaughter* :—How many thrones have been reached through bloodshed. “To wade” object of “forbade.”—17, 3.

*Shut gates of mercy* :—The cruelty of many rulers is beautifully expressed by this strong figure.

18. The struggling pangs of conscious Truth to hide,  
     To quench the blushes of ingenuous Shame,  
     Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride,  
     With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

*Pangs of conscious Truth to hide; and blushes of ingenuous Shame* :—Their lot was so humble, their opinions were not of sufficient importance to arouse inquisition and persecution, to avoid which persons of prominence not only “concealed,” but often “shamelessly” denied the “conscious truth” within them.

*To hide* and *to quench* are both the object of “forbade.”—17, 3.

*Shrine* :—A case in which something sacred is deposited. This was frequently made of stone, handsomely carved, and contained the remains of some person eminent for piety and valor. Pilgrims formerly visited these shrines in great numbers, and deposited on them valuable offerings of gold, jewelry, etc. The shrine of Thomas a' Becket, in Canterbury Cathedral was thus adorned with gold and jewels, to the sum of many pounds. *Morris & Stevens. Canterbury Tales* are the stories which Chaucer supposes he and his fellow-pilgrims told for mutual entertainment while on their way to visit the shrine of Thomas a' Becket.

*Incense* :—Is fragrant materials frequently burned in censers before shrines, especially in Catholic services, before the shrines of Mary and Christ.

*Muse's flame* :—The ancient poets personified the various intellectual exercises of mankind under the name of Muses. These were said to be the daughters of Jove and Mnemosyne, i. e., Memory. Some say there were three muses: Memory, Song and Meditation. Others say there were nine, viz: History, Tragedy, Comedy, Use of Flute, the Lyre, the Lute, Heroic Verse, Astrology and Rhetoric. The poet here alludes to those who debased the art of poetry by writing, in hope of reward, flattering verses in praise of persons who were addicted to habits of luxury, and pride.—*Morris & Stevens.*

As for instance Gray, in the fifteenth stanza, when he toutes to the crown by representing Cromwell as guilty of his own country's blood. The English poets are much more frequently open to the charge than the American. While this country was agonizing for liberty, Tennyson was apparently unconscious of the struggle, as he has always been of such struggles in England. On the other hand, there is no American poet but has his poems on freedom.

*Suppressed Stanzas.*

In the first MS. of this poem, Gray had inserted between the 18th and the 19th stanzas the following, which he afterwards omitted :

- a. The thoughtless world to majesty may bow,  
Exalt the brave, and idolize success;  
But more to innocence their safety owe,  
Than power or genius e'er conspir'd to bless.
- b. And thou, who, mindful of th' unhoneor'd dead,  
Dost, in these notes, their artless tale relate,  
By night and lonely contemplation led,  
To wander in the gloomy walks of fate,
- c. Hark! how the sacred calm, that breathes around,  
Bids ev'ry fierce, tumultuous passion cease;  
In still, small accents whisp'ring from the ground  
A grateful earnest of eternal peace.
- d. No more, with reason and thyself at strife,  
Give anxious cares and endless wishes room;  
But, through the cool, sequester'd vale of life,  
Pursue the silent lesson of thy doom.

*Stanza a* :—Is a beautiful and logical conclusion to the course of thought in the two preceding stanzas and the 19th, which it should follow; and one cannot feel content that it is omitted.

*Stanza b* :—Was moulded into stanza 24, where it plainly is in better place.

*Stanza c* :—Is most exquisite. It is the very embodiment of the holy calm that breathes around and whispers from the ground of the quiet churchyard. Yet, it is not in unity with the stanzas adjacent to it. How appropriately it might follow the 3d stanza. Let the pupils learn it in this connection.

*Stanza d* :—This stanza has been recast partly into the 19th.

19. Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,  
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;  
Along the cool, sequester'd vale of life  
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way.

INTRODUCTORY.—Having shown how their lot circumscribed their virtues (16) and confined their vices (17, 18), the poet concludes this view with a pretty description of their quiet life.

*Far* :—Is an adjective in the predicate with [being] understood, and has no connection with “stray.” The idea is: “[They being] far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife, their wishes never learned to stray.”

*Madding* :—Not maddening, but raging, excited,

*Sequester'd*:—Secluded, retired.

*Tenor*:—Course, path.

**CONCLUSION.**—This stanza concludes the series of reflections upon this rude people in so far as it bears upon their lives, as suggested by their graves, in the grave-yard in which the poet is supposed to be resting. Let the class review the points made by the poet in behalf of this humble people, beginning with 5th stanza:

1. Description of their lives. (5, 6, 7.)
2. Their title to consideration from the ambitious, grand, &c. (8.)
3. Equality of all before death. (9.)
4. Their lack of costly monuments not important. (10, 11.)
5. What they might have been for good had their lot not forbade. (12-16.)
6. What they were not that was bad because of their lot. (17, 18, 19.)

**20.** Yet e'en these bones from insult to protect,

Some frail memorial still, erected nigh,

With uncouth rhymes and shapeless sculpture deck'd,

Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—The poet now returns to the thought of the 10th stanza, where he insists that it should not be imputed as a fault to these people, because they have no costly monuments, &c., to decorate and honor their last resting places.

Having in the intermediate stanzas reviewed their lives in the light of these and other supposed difficulties, he now comes again to the consideration of the plain memorials which have been erected over their graves.

*These bones*:—That is, the bones of these rude forefathers. “Bones” is the object of “to protect.”

*From*:—Shows relation between “insult” and “protect.”

*To protect*:—Infinitive with construction of adverb, limiting “erected.”

*Memorial*:—That is, the wooden tablet or “head-board” on which were painted, or possibly carved (sculptured), the name, years, &c., of the deceased. “Memorial” is the subject of “implores.”

*Still*:—The disposition of this word is various. A majority of the texts have no comma after “still,” in which case “still” is an adverb, modifying “erected”; meaning that the frail memorial still *stands* nigh.

In the “McGuffey’s Sixth Reader, Revised,” it is punctuated as above, a comma following “still,” separating it from “erected,” and making it modify “implores” in the fourth line. This is the better view.

*Erected*:—Participle, with construction of an adjective, limiting “memorial.”

*With*:—Shows relation of “rhymes” and “sculpture” to “deck'd.”

*Uncouth*:—Awkward, inelegant.

*Sculpture*:—The rude carving of angels, &c., on the head-board. See “memorial.”

**Deck'd** :—Participle, with construction of adjective, limiting “memorial.”

**Implores** :—Agrees with the subject “memorial.”

**Passing** :—How prettily this word, which really modifies “persons” understood, is made to modify “tribute.” That is, instead of saying “Implores the tribute of a sigh from persons passing by,” the poet consolidated the whole thought within the limits of his line and his meter.

**PARAPHRASE.**—Although no costly monuments decorate these graves, yet each one has erected at its head some frail memorial, bearing upon it rude paintings and carvings, which protects from insult and begs for considerate attention from those who pass by.

**CONCLUSION.**—The description begun in this stanza is completed in the next.

21. Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse,  
    The place of fame and elegy supply ;  
And many a holy text around she strews,  
    That teach the rustic moralist to die.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—In this and the preceding stanza, the poet beautifully describes the plain memorials which mark the graves of these humble persons. In the preceding he indicates the crude sculpturing upon the head-board. In this, he mentions the words probably painted on the boards. These consist of (1) the name of the deceased, (2) his birth and death and age [years], (3) some sacred quotation suitable to the person.

**Their** :—The rude forefathers.

**Name** :—One of the subjects of “supply.”

**Years** :—That is, the date of birth, death, and their age, probably. Years is another subject of “supply.”

**Spelt** :—This is a good word here for two reasons: (1) there is no other suitable word of one syllable such as the meter requires; (2) it indicates, possibly, the illiterate character of the spelling and writing.

**Th'** :—The “e” is elided to make one syllable or foot of “th'un.” This line is a marvel of metrical ingenuity.

**Unletter'd** :—The “e” is elided for metrical purposes, it being understood that unless it is thus marked it is to be pronounced.

**Muse** :—See stanza 18. By the “unletter'd muse” is meant the writer of the “uncouth rhymes,” (29, 3,) which are found upon the head-boards.

**Place** :—Object of “supply.”

**Fame and elegy** :—That is, as indicated in stanzas 10 and 12. “Elegy” is a funeral song.

**Text** :—The quotation, usually from the Bible, on the head-board. Object of “strews.”

**She** :—That is, the “muse,” line 1.

**Teach** :—Is plural, agreeing with the idea of plurality given to the singular noun “text,” its subject, by the adjective “many a.” In stanza 18—“Full many a flower is born to blush,” &c., “many a” has a singular force, which is probably the right. If so, “teach” is plural by poetic license; as, if it were singular, “teaches,” it would spoil the meter of the line.

**Rustic** :—Belonging to the country, rather than the town.

**Moralist** :—He who stops to read the texts and to moralize upon them.

22. For who, to dumb forgetfulness a prey,  
    This pleasing, anxious being e'er resign'd,  
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,  
    Nor cast one longing, ling'ring look behind?

**INTRODUCTORY.**—Further discussion of the fact that e'en these humble bones have some fond memorial erected over them to protect from insult and implore a tribute of a sigh.

**PARAPHRASE.**—For who is there who is so far a prey to dumb forgetfulness as to resign this pleasing, anxious being, or leave the warm precinct of the cheerful day, without casting behind him one longing, lingering look: or, who is so indifferent to life as to die without a regret?

**For** :—Not only have the dead of these humble people received some attention from those they leave behind them, but who is there who, when he dies, does not look back with satisfaction to the possibility of receiving such attentions?

**To** :—Shows the relation between [being] understood and “forgetfulness.”

Swinton, in his *Masterpieces of English Literature*, p. 201, paraphrases this as follows: “Whoever resigned this pleasing, anxious being [life] as a prey to dumb forgetfulness?” Thus making “to” show the relation between “forgetfulness” and “resigned.” This is evidently a slip which might be excused in a Sixth Reader Class, but hardly in so eminent an author and critic.

The idea is, of course, “Who, being a prey to dumb Forgetfulness, e'er resigned,” etc., or left, etc.

**Who** :—Subject of “resigned,” “left” and “cast.”

**Forgetfulness** :—Here personified as a monster preying upon the mind, destroying all recollections of life. How suitable is the epithet “dumb!” What one forgets will, of course, never be spoken of.

**Prey** :—Is nominative absolute, with participle [being] understood.

**Pleasing, anxious** :—Fitly describing life.

**Being—resign'd** :—Died.

**E'er** :—Adverb modifying both “resigned” and “left.”

**Left \* \* day** :—Another expression for “died.” The pupils should be encouraged to use, in their own compositions, both this and the preceding line as delicate euphemisms for death.

**Precincts:**—Regions. The precincts of the warm daylight are to the regions of cold darkness as life is to death.

**Longing, ling'ring:**—Note the pleasing alliteration. See Stanza 4. Let the pupils look for and gather the examples of alliteration in the poem when it has been read through.

**CONCLUSION:**—The thought of this stanza is continued and completed in the next.

- 23. On some fond breast the 'parting soul relies,  
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;  
E'en from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,  
E'en in our ashes live their wonted fires.**

**INTRODUCTORY:**—The preceding stanza is the general statement of which this is the particular; that is the abstract, this the concrete. Which is the more effective and affecting?

**Parting:**—For departing. See Stanza 1.

**Relies:**—No one is so indifferent as not to desire, at least, some fond, affectionate breast on which to rely or lean.

**'Parting soul—closing eye:**—Two more pretty euphemisms for death.

**Pious:**—How neatly this solemnizes the picture with holy covering of religion.

**Drops:**—Tears, which, the poet says, no one is so far a prey to dumb forgetfulness as not to desire to have shed for him.

**Requires:**—This word may have been *sought* for, as a suitable rhyme for "fires." It certainly is better than "desires," because it is not so common place, and is more energetic, peremptory.

**E'en from the tomb \* \* cries:**—This desire not to be forgotten after death, which is so touchingly recognized in these "frail memorials," seems to be a voice of Nature, speaking from the tombs themselves.

**Ashes:**—Remains, alluding to the ancient practice of cremation or burning the dead. See Stanza 11, "Storied urn."

**Live:**—Agrees with fires.

**Wanted:**—Accustomed.

**Fires:**—Aspirations, ambitions, hopes and desires.

**E'en our ashes \* \* pious:**—These frail memorials, with what is written on them, give continued life—a kind of immortality, to the hopes and aspirations of those whose ashes lie within the tombs.

**CONCLUSION:**—This stanza really concludes the poem, so far as it is an Elegy upon these humble people, the remaining portion being devoted by the poet to himself. It ends where it began, by commenting upon the objects before him in the graveyard.

Let the class glance back over the whole ground passed over, and pass in pleasant review: The evening scene of the stanzas, 1st—2d; the

church, 3d; the graves of the forefathers in the church-yard, 4th; the morning scene, 5th; the home scene, 6th; the out-door life, 7th; the defence of their humble lives, 8th—19th; the appreciative description of their grave decorations and memorials, 20th—23d.

**24.** *For thee, who, mindful of th' unhonored dead,  
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate,  
If 'chance, by lonely Contemplation led,  
Some kindred spirit shall enquire thy fate,*

**25.** *Haply, some hoary-headed swain may say :*

INTRODUCTORY.—Having devoted himself to these humble people, the poet now allows his thoughts to flow in a purely personal channel, and makes himself his theme. He wonders if when he is laid within this churchyard, some one, with habits and disposition similar to his own, with his love of solitude and lonely reflections, will visit this place as he is visiting it now, and possibly enquire about him.

*For* :—Shows relation between “thee” and “say,” (25, 1) i. e., “Some hoary-headed swain may say for thee.”

*Thee* :—The poet himself. This is the usual interpretation, but a good argument can be made for the interpretation that “thee” refers to the unlettered muse mentioned in stanza 21, as follows:

*First.* The poet would not be so egotistical as to make a poem, the special merit of which is that it is mindful of dead who would otherwise be unhonored, culminate in a conceited celebration of his own personal peculiarities and eccentricities.

*Second.* The unity of the whole poem would seem to demand that the artless tale of these unhonored dead should find its appropriate climax in the special consideration of the only literary character of their number, namely, the “unlettered muse.”

*Third.* The description given by the “hoary-headed swain” of “thee” is a most graphic account of a local oddity, possessing sufficient literary ability to compose a rhyme or two for the tombstones; commanding by this ability the respect of the unlettered community, as he would, also, arouse their curiosity, and even a superstitious reverence not unmixed with sympathy, by his solitary, simple life; yet retaining, withal, their sincere love by his meagre but kindly benevolence.

*Fourth.* A careful study of the poem, *as it stands*, will discover no insuperable obstacle to this interpretation. The suppressed stanzas furnish positive evidence that the poet did refer to himself in these last stanzas.

The connection of the two lungs:

“And thou, who, mindful of th' unhonored dead,  
Dost in these notes their artless tale relate,”

in stanza 6, of the suppressed stanzas, and their reconstruction and introduction into this, leave no doubt as to the author's intention.

*On the other hand*, it may be urged that the personal element thus introduced into the poem gives it a genuine flavor that it must otherwise have

lacked, and which has really maintained its popularity. That a person of Gray's talents and celebrity should yield himself to the public in a character of such loneliness and melancholy, and so practically make himself one of this humble people; and that he should prepare for himself an epitaph of such modest and yet touching simplicity;—all this, accompanied with the plaintive evidence of the sincerity in these utterances which his peculiar life and habits afforded, gives to the whole poem that color of sadness which, Poe maintained, appeals to the profoundest sentiment of the human heart and affords the surest and most enduring claim upon its sympathies.

**NOTE TO THE TEACHER.**—These two interpretations should afford an occasion for a very profitable debate in the class. In their efforts to maintain their views, the pupils will give the poem a searching investigation which nothing else could arouse, and, at the same time, will give themselves practice in the original expression of their thoughts, which is the more valuable because spontaneous, and in the heat of conflicting opinions.

In the management of this discussion, the teacher should enforce all the forms of parliamentary usage, and strive to array the class on sides chosen without bias of any sort from himself.

Nothing so greatly forestalls and prevents all original thinking and talking, on the part of the pupils, as the teacher habitually deciding all such questions dogmatically, before independent judgment and expression is indulged in by the pupils. The teacher should always reserve his decisions until a majority of his class have studied, and thought, and talked themselves to the right conclusions.

*Who* :—Subject of “dost.”

*Mindful* :—Try to substitute another word.

*Unhonor'd* :—Not dishonored.

*These lines* :—That is, this poem.

*Artless* :—The force of this word is really upon “relate” rather than upon “tale.” In other words, the poet speaks of his own poem as an “artless” unstudied, unpretentious effort. It took him seven years to make it so.

*Chance* :—For perchance, an elision for metrical effect, as in “’parting,’ i. i. It modifies “inquire.”

*Contemplation* :—How pretty the personification indicated by the capital.

*Led* :—Has the construction of an adjective, limiting “spirit.” The alliteration of “lonely” and “led” is pleasing.

*Kindred Spirit* :—That is, some person who has habits similar to those here ascribed by the poet to himself and actually exemplified while in the grave-yard, indulging in the reflections which go to make up this poem.

**PARAPHRASE.**—If some kindred spirit, led by lonely contemplation, shall chance to inquire concerning the fate of thee who hast remembered

these humble people by writing this unostentatious story about them, possibly some hoary-headed swain may say for thee : This includes, of course, the first line of the next stanza.

- 25. Haply, some hoary-headed swain may say :**  
 " Oft have we seen him at the peep of dawn,  
 Brushing, with hasty steps, the dews away,  
 To meet the Sun upon the upland lawn.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—With the second line of this stanza begins the description by Gray of himself, as uttered by the hoary-headed swain. It continues to the epitaph, concluding with the 29th stanza.

*Haply* :—Perhaps, limits “say.”

*Hoary-headed* :—Gray-headed. Hoar frost is white frost, hence a head white with age is frosted or hoary.

*Swain* :—An old English word for countryman

*We* :—The people who live in the vicinity of the grave-yard, of whom the speaker is one.

*Him* :—The poet. Objective, subject of “[to be] brushing.”

*Peep of Dawn* :—How pretty for the break of day!

*Brushing* :—This is the strong word of the line. Infinitive, object of “seen.”

*To meet the Sun* :—To see him rise. “To meet” has the construction of an adverb, limiting “[to be] brushing.”

*Upland* :—Sloping.

*Lawn* :—The old meaning was meadow, but now, a grassy plot in front of a house.

**CONCLUSION.**—The habit of taking early morning walks was one of Gray's peculiarities.

### *Suppressed Stanza.*

*Following Stanza 25.*

- e. “ Him have we seen the greenwood side along,  
 While o'er the heath we had our labor done,  
 Oft as the woodlark piped her farewell song,  
 With wistful eyes pursue the setting Sun.

**INTRODUCTION**—In the first MS. this verse followed the 25th stanza, which it balances beautifully. In that, the poet meets the Sun at the peep of dawn ; in this, he pursues the setting Sun ; in that, brushing the dews away ; in this, while o'er the heath we had our labor done, and as the woodlark piped her farewell song ; in that, upon the upland lawn ; in this, the greenwood side along.

Thus, all the points of the morning walk in the 25th are exactly complimented by corresponding points of the evening walk in this stanza, except that two features of the evening are given here while only one is there.

This is due to the lack of a line in the 25th, or an extra line in this, the 2d line affording the extra item. This line was also probably the cause of the stanza being thrown out.

It would seem as if the stanza should have followed the 26th, rather than the 25th, as by that arrangement the morning, noon and evening scenes would have appeared in order.

The 27th is probably intended as the evening walk, and would seem to be a substitute for this. It includes, at any rate, the neighborhood of the "greenwood side." The repetition of this feature here may also have led to its sacrifice there.

What rhetorical courage the poet exhibited in thus consigning to oblivion these beautiful lines, rather than mar, in the least, the symmetry of the poem!

*Him* :—Objective, subject "[to] pursue."

*Greenwood* :—Object of along.

*While* \* \* *done* :—This probably means "When we were coming over the heath after our day's labor had been finished," or "after we had done our day's work over, or beyond, the heath." This ambiguity was doubtless the objection to the line.

*Oft* :—That is, every evening. It limits "seen" and "piped," as a conjunctive adverb.

*With* :—Shows relation of "eyes" to "pursue."

*Pursue* :—" [To] pursue," infinitive, with construction of noun, object of "seen."

**CONCLUSION.**—The teacher may well give sufficient time to these suppressed stanzas. They are "behind the scene" affairs, which are always interesting—especially as connected with any of our popular poems. They also indicate by what scrupulous rigor of rhetorical pruning immortality is secured to literary effort.

26. "There, at the foot of yonder nodding beech,  
    That wreathes its old fantastic roots so high,  
    His listless length at noontide would he stretch,  
    And pore upon the brook that babbles by—

**INTRODUCTORY.**—Even at noon-time would he loiter solitarily in the wood.

*There* :—Limits "stretch" and "pore."

*At* :—Shows relation between "foot" and "stretch."

*Nodding* :—Waving.

*Wreathes* :—How much better than twists.

*Fantastic* :—Strange, curious. Every lover of the woods has repeatedly realized the beauty of this description of the beech, and quoted it with never-ceasing satisfaction.

*Listless* :—Not listening, hence, inattentive, idle.

**Pore** :—To look closely.

**Babbles** :—This word exemplifies the figure of *onomatopœia*—the use of a word (or words) the sound of which is like the sound described. Bang, bleat, flash, murmur, rumble, smash, are a few of the many familiar onomatopœic words in the English.

**CONCLUSION.**—The author here again describes his own habits.

**27.** “Hard by yon wood, now smiling, as in scorn.

Mutt'ring his wayward fancies, he would rove;  
Now drooping, woful-wan, like one forlorn,  
Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—This stanza is of the evening, as the two preceding are, respectively, of the morning and noon. See suppressed stanza *e*. The stanza is remarkable for the words which describe the varying moods of the poet. Let the pupils pick them out.

**Hard** :—Close, limits “by yon wood.”

**Smiling, mutt'ring, drooping, woful-wan, craz'd, cross'd** :—All limit ‘he,’ l. 2.

**He would** :—Not “would he,” because it would be repeating the inversion of 26, 3.

**Woful-wan** :—Thus the poet wrote it. In many texts it is printed as two simple words, but in none with a comma between. The poet intended it as a compound adjective, which is pretty as well as peculiar. To make two words, especially with a comma between, would be comparatively common place.

**Craz'd, care, cross'd** :—Note the alliteration.

**CONCLUSION.**—The description of the wandering habits of the poet is complete with this stanza.

**28.** “One morn I miss'd him on the 'custom'd hill,

Along the heath, and near his favorite tree:

Another came; nor yet beside the rill,

Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—Note how rapidly, yet gracefully, the narrative proceeds.

**Morn** :—O'ject of [upon]. Upon a certain morning.

**'Custom'd** :—For accustomed. See “'parting,” l. 1, 1.

**Hill** :—Where in the preceding stanza did he mention “hill;” so “heath,” “tree,” “lawn” and “wood.”

**Another** :—Another [morn] came.

**Nor** :—For “and not;” thus, “*and yet he was not* beside the rill.”

**CONCLUSION.**—The secluded life of the poet is here forcibly indicated. How he died, or where, the “swain” could not tell. All he knew was the favorite spots were not haunted by their accustomed visitor.

29. "The next, with dirges due, in sad array,  
Slow through the church-way path we saw him borne.  
Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay,  
'Grav'd on the stone beneath yon aged thorn.'"

INTRODUCTORY.—Let the pupils note how much of incident and detail of description is compressed in these four lines. The funeral scene in the first two, and the grave-yard scene in the last two, would fill two elaborate canvases of an artist.

*The next*:—The next morning.

*Dirges*:—A dirge is a funeral song.

*Due*:—Appropriate; that is, to the person and occasion.

*Slow*:—An adjective, used by poetical license for the adverb slowly. It would not be allowable in prose.

*Him*:—Objective, subject of "[to be] borne."

*Thou*:—Antecedent is "kindred spirit," 24, 4. In reading, emphasize so as to imply that the hoary-headed swain could not read.

*Lay*:—The epitaph which follows.

*'Grav'd*:—For engraved. See "'parting,'" 1, 1.

*Stone*:—Head-stone.

*Thorn*:—Probably a hawthorn. It may be a holly tree. One still grows at the foot of Gray's grave, a leaf from which, enclosed in a beautifully illustrated volume of the Elegy, was presented to the author a few years ago, by a former pupil, with the following inscription: "English holly leaf (Christmas green) taken from a shrub growing at the foot of Gray's grave, near the "ivy-mantled" church, at Stoke Pogis, not far from Windsor, and in sight of Eaton's classic walls and turrets. July 17, 1883." The leaf of the holly is spined, and the shrub could be properly spoken of as a thorn.

CONCLUSION.—This stanza completes the remarks of the hoary-headed swain to the kindred spirit begun 25, 2, all of which is the object of "say," 25, 1.

These sad incidents in the life of one devoted to this humble people form a most appropriate closing to this account of their lives. Would it be more touching, could we but feel that stanzas 24-32 were dedicated to the "unlettered muse," a particular individual of the general class upon whom the preceding stanzas were bestowed?

### *Suppressed Stanza.*

*Following Stanza 29.*

- f. There, scatter'd oft, the earliest of the year,  
By hands unseen, are showers of violets found;  
The red-breast loves to build and warble there,  
And little footsteps lightly print the ground.

INTRODUCTORY.—Mason, the friend and biographer of Gray, says: "This beautiful stanza, which was printed in some of the first editions, was afterwards omitted by Gray, because he thought it was too long a parenthesis in this place." May not some personal feelings have been mixed with these literary considerations?

*There* :—At the grave; limits "are found."

*Scatter'd* :—Limits "showers (of violets)."

*Earliest* :—Limits "violets."

*By* :—Shows relation between "hands" and "scattered."

*Unseen* :—Adjective, limiting "hands."

CONCLUSION.—These sweet lines should never become separated from the poem.

30. Here rests his head upon the lap of Earth,  
     A youth to Fortune and to Fame unknown;  
     Fair Science frown'd not on his humble birth,  
     And melancholy mark'd him for her own.

INTRODUCTORY.—This and the two following stanzas were separated by Gray from the preceding with the title "Epitaph;" which means an inscription on a tomb, from the Greek *επιτί*, upon, and *τάφος*, a tomb.

*His* :—Antecedent "youth."

—*Lap of Earth* :—The poet here speaks of the Earth as his mother, in allusion to the Scriptural account of the Creation of Man from the "dust of the ground," and represents himself as sleeping the sleep of death, with his head resting upon her lap, after the manner of a little child.—*Stevens & Morris*.

*Youth* :—Subject of "rests."

—*Science frown'd not etc* :—That is, though of humble birth, he received a good education.

*Humble birth* :—The poet's mother was a milliner, and from that business supported herself, and kept her son at college. She was separated from her husband on account of his cruelty.

*Mark'd* :—In allusion to the custom of marking cattle.

—*Melancholy \*\*\* for her own* :—The poet's melancholy disposition is thus indicated.

CONCLUSION.—In this stanza is set forth the poet's inner life.

31. Large was his bounty, and his soul sincere,  
     Heav'n did a recompense as largely send:  
     He gave to mis'ry all he had—a tear;  
     He gain'd from Heav'n ('twas all he w sh'd) a friend.

INTRODUCTION.—Here his onward life is indicated, and most beautifully added are the allusions to his future state.

*Bounty* :—Charity, liberality.

*As largely* :—The common place adjective large, modifying “recompense,” is neatly displaced by this adverb, limiting “send,” and at the same time the demands of the metre are ingeniously met.

*Bounty—tear; sincere—friend* :—Let the pupils show how the last two lines are a particular statement of which the first two are the general.

**CONCLUSION.**—This is the most ingenious stanza in the poem.

32. No farther seek his merits to disclose,  
    Or draw his frailties from their dread abode,  
    (There they alike in trembling hope repose,)  
        The bosom of his Father and his God.

**INTRODUCTORY.**—The highest test of any effort is its *finale*. Of the many masterly strokes of this poem, this stanza, as a culminating, finishing touch, is perhaps the most matchless.

How deftly does he relieve himself of his theme, in the first two lines; and with what dignified composure does he, in the last two, lead us into and leave us in the solemn presence of a “Father and a God.”

*Merits* :—Object of “disclose.”

*To disclose* :—Object of “seek.”

*Dread* :—Venerable in the highest degree, inspiring awe; as, *dread sovereign*. The difference between *dread* and *fear* is distinctly implied in the familiar lines :

“ Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings.”

*Abode* :—The “dread abode” is the “bosom of his Father and his God.”

*There* :—That is, in their dread abode.

*They* :—That is, his “merits” and “frailties.”

*Bosom* :—Objective, in apposition with “abode.”

## OUTLINES OF GRAY'S ELEGY.

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Having completed the reading of the poem, the class may, as a means of review, be required to prepare a careful outline, something like the following:

- 1<sup>1</sup>** Introduction, 1-4. The circumstances suggesting the Elegy.
- 1<sup>2</sup>** Time and general surroundings, 1-2.
- 2<sup>2</sup>** Special surroundings, 3-4.
  - 1<sup>3</sup>** The church. **2<sup>2</sup>** The grave-yard.
  - 3<sup>2</sup>** Theme announced, 3-1.
- 2<sup>1</sup>** The Elegy proper. The rude forefathers, 5-19.
  - 1<sup>2</sup>** Their lives, 5-19.
    - 1<sup>3</sup>** Description of, 5-7.
    - 1<sup>4</sup>** Morning scene, 5. **2<sup>4</sup>** Evening scene, 6. **3<sup>4</sup>** Day scene, 7.
  - 2<sup>3</sup>** Comments upon, 8-19.
    - 1<sup>4</sup>** Though poor, worthy, 7.
    - 2<sup>4</sup>** Equal with the rich in death, 9-11.
    - 3<sup>4</sup>** General defence; lack of opportunities, 12-19.
      - 1<sup>5</sup>** Their virtues circumscribed, 12-16.
      - 2<sup>5</sup>** Their crimes confined, 17-19.
  - 2<sup>2</sup>** Their burial place, 20-24.
    - 1<sup>3</sup>** Description of, 20-21.
    - 2<sup>3</sup>** Comments upon, 22-23.
  - 3<sup>2</sup>** Conclusion—the Poet, 24-32.
    - 1<sup>3</sup>** His life, 24-27.
    - 2<sup>3</sup>** His death, 28-29.
    - 3<sup>3</sup>** His epitaph, 30-32.

## CLUDING SUGGESTIONS.

*The Elegy in Prose.*—After the recitation upon the outline, and reviewing by means of it the course of the poem, assign as the next lesson: To write the whole poem in prose; in other words, with the poem before them, to paraphrase it completely. At the next recitation hear a few of these paraphrases read; collect them all; now ask the pupils to write, without notes or the text of the poem, as creditable a paraphrase as possible in fifteen minutes.

*The Elegy Memorized.*—After all the drill, it will be found that the most of the pupils have, without special effort, committed most of the poem. It is to be supposed that the teacher, through the whole course of study of the poem, has drilled and encouraged them to this end by frequent repetitions. As a next lesson, let the pupil prepare to recite it orally, and to write it from memory. This will not be burdensome, now. If there are some who cannot commit it, do not insist. No one should memorize this poem who does not enjoy memorizing it. At the next recitation hear successive pupils recite successive stanzas, letting those who wish take turns. As each stanza is recited, drill the whole class on it. Then let some one who could not, try it; so on till the whole poem is reviewed. Now let the pupils write the poem from memory. Take standing by subtracting 3 from 100 for each stanza omitted. For a closer test on certain stanzas, let one be written at a time. In computing standing, count each capital, each punctuation mark, the spelling of each word as a point; subtract one for each one of these points missed, from whole number of points, annex two cyphers to remainder and divide by whole number of points. The result is, of course, the standing.

*The Elegy in Prose by Stanzas.*—As another lesson, assign to each pupil a single stanza as a theme for a written essay. The relation of the stanza to the adjacent ones, the explication of the interesting points, the statement of the more difficult grammatical constructions, the presentation of any thoughts suggested by any portion of the stanza, &c., &c., should form the subject matter of such an effort.

*The Elegy in Tableaux.*—A pretty review of the poem can be obtained by having each morning or evening a tableau of a single stanza. If the teacher has no gift at this kind of work, let him trust to the ingenuity of his pupils. He will be alike surprised and delighted with their skill and taste and interest.

*The Elegy Entertainment.*—These various exercises, prepared as the regular work of the school, can be grouped into a public pay entertainment, which will prove very pleasing and instructive. The following items may appear on the program: 1. The recitation of the poem, each stanza by a pupil. 2. Recitation of the whole poem by the class in concert. 3. A Tableau of first stanza. 4. Recitation of poem, line by line, by successive

pupils of the class, all participating. 5. The biography of Gray, as an original composition, delivered without notes, by some member of the class. 6. Tableau of 4th stanza. 7. The Elegy in prose (selected from those written by the class). 8. History of the poem, an original composition, delivered without notes, by some member of the class. 9. Tableau of 6th stanza. 10. Eight 2-minute essays on the first eight stanzas. 11. Tableau of the "Animated Bust," of the 11th stanza. (A fixed-up lamp-post with an animated fellow on a "bust," holding it up affectionately.) 12. Eight 2-minute essays on the next eight stanzas. 13. And so on. Let these exercises be interspersed with music, and the audience will not only go away pleased, but they will have reason to thank this class for giving them an opportunity to review and enjoy thoroughly the most popular poem in the language.

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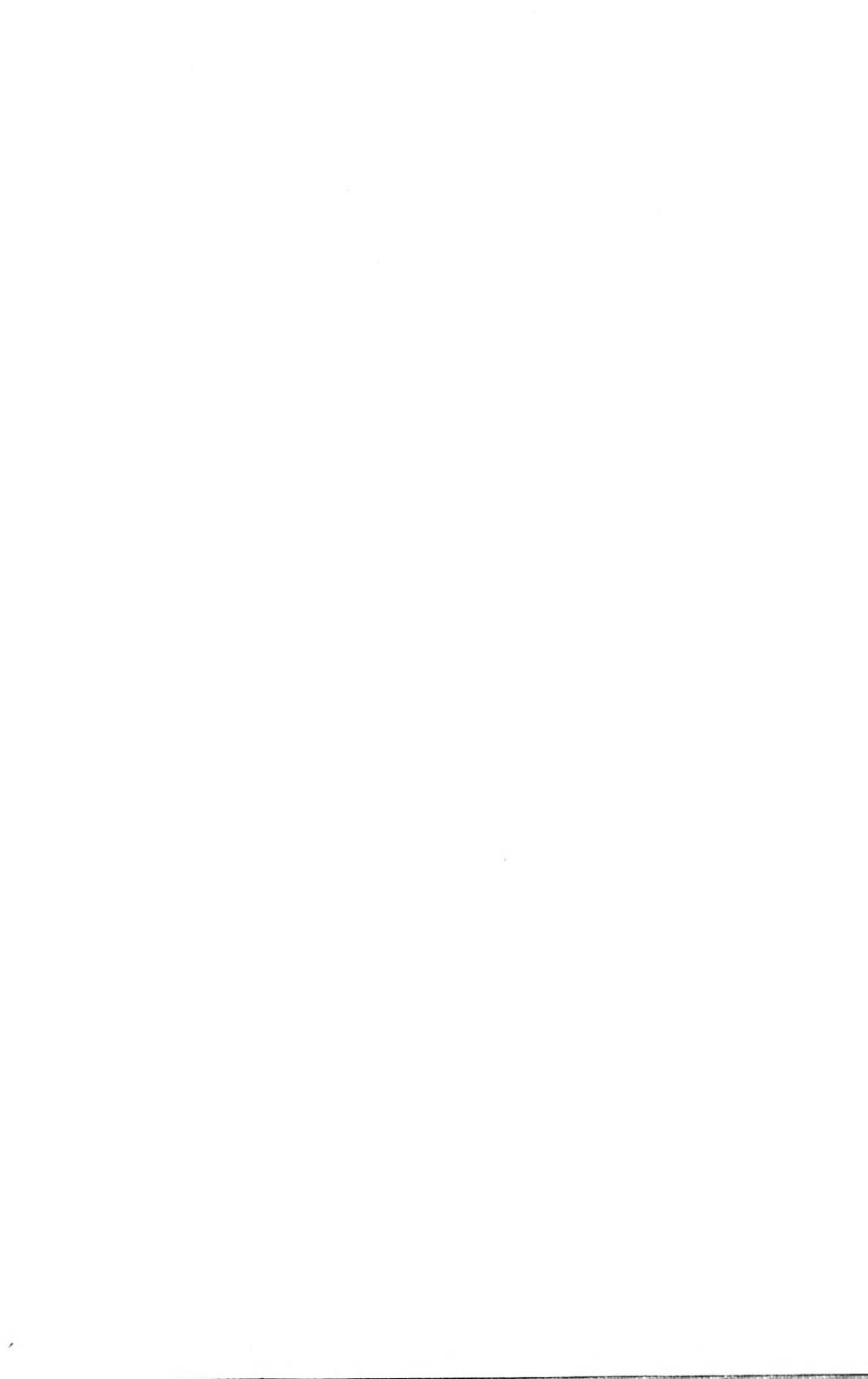
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